



Toolbox for Stressful Times

Stressors, Self-Care, and Focusing on What We Can Control

When dealing with infertility, we often face a whole host of potentially stressful situations: doctor appointments, blood draws, invasive testing and scans, medicated cycles, negative pregnancy tests, expecting our “time of the month,” pregnancy or newborn announcements, holidays, Mothers’ Day etc. When we feel our anxiety and stress levels start to rise, it’s important to pause and realize that those feelings are signals that we need to give ourselves grace. A great way to do this is to create a “Toolbox for Stressful Times” - an action plan with self-care activities and other support to help us navigate through challenges. Better yet, we can even take note of activities that *may* stress us out in the future, and create this plan ahead of time, which may help to alleviate the anxiety even more. Anxiety can often occur when we feel a loss of control, and creating a plan helps us to recognize that there are aspects that we can control, such as how we approach self-care during this time. This, in turn, reduces our anxiety. In addition to giving us a sense of control, creating a self-care plan also makes sure that we have the necessary supports in place and informs our “support team” of what will best help us through a particular day, week or season.

Setting up Your Self-Care Action Plan

When creating a “Toolbox for Stressful Times” consider the following areas:

- ★ Home/housework - What are some ways I can lessen my workload at home? What can I do ahead of time that will help me feel calmer at home? Eg: cook in big batches to lighten meal prep, chores/errands that can be postponed or done in advance.
- ★ Spiritual - How can I maintain my relationship with God during this time? Consider: prayer time, scripture reading, adoration, spiritual direction, confession, daily Mass.
- ★ Social - Who can I surround myself with that will help me be in a good place? When can I schedule coffee dates/get-togethers/phone calls and with whom?
- ★ Emotional - What helps me stay on an even keel emotionally? Consider: scheduling a counselling session, reading, journaling, crafts, coloring, etc.
- ★ Physical - What can I do to help take care of my body during stressful times? Consider: early bedtime, daily walk, dance or fitness class, healthy and enjoyable snacks.
- ★ Work - Are there any work tasks I can complete ahead of time, delegate or postpone so that I have less to worry about during the stressful event/season?
- ★ Spouse - What are the most helpful things for my spouse to do or say during the upcoming stressful event/season? What special dates and bonding time can we plan together? Make sure to share these ideas with your spouse! Don’t make him/her guess!
- ★ Things to look forward to/things to avoid - What trips/activities/treats could I plan so that I have something to look forward to? Are there any activities/triggers that would be best to avoid during that time? (Facebook, I’m looking at you!)

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Example

The Stressor: *Upcoming weeks with lots of bloodwork*

<p>~Home~</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan out easy meals ahead of time - Cook a large crockpot meal on Sundays so I don't need to cook as much during the week - Postpone other errands 	<p>~Spiritual~</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask a friend for prayers on specific days - Weekly adoration - Pray for fortitude - Keep up with spiritual and/or scripture reading 15 mins a day to keep my mind focused on things above
<p>~Social~</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schedule a coffee date or a walk with a friend each Thursday 	<p>~Emotional~</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick out some fun, easy books to read - make sure to carve out one or two blocks a day for quiet time for myself to read and recharge
<p>~Physical~</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early bedtime - Daily walks - Drink lots of water and have a good snack if allowed before bloodwork 	<p>~Work~</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try to complete major projects before bloodwork series starts - Prioritize work to-do list so I'm only focusing on the most important tasks for the next few weeks
<p>~Spouse~</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Request a big hug and "thank you!" after each bloodwork session - Plan an at-home movie night for week 1 and a hiking date for week 2 	<p>~Looking forward to/things to avoid~</p> <p>Looking forward to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have a piece of chocolate ready for after each bloodwork session. Schedule a 15-30-min break to read a book or magazine afterwards - Coffee shop treat after all bloodwork done <p>Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facebook for these, replace with uplifting reading

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Your Turn

The Stressor:

~Home~	~Spiritual~
~Social~	~Emotional~
~Physical~	~Work~
~Spouse~	~Looking forward to/things to avoid~